**New Orleans and All That Jazz**

When you think of that most uniquely American form of music called jazz, one city stands out like no other: New Orleans. European and African musical traditions came together in New Orleans to give birth to jazz, and there’s no better place to celebrate this American art form than during the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival.

From its modest beginnings in 1970, with gospel singer Mahalia Jackson and bandleader Duke Ellington as the headliners, the festival has grown to include dozens of musicians performing on multiple stages, as well as food and arts and crafts that represent Louisiana’s diverse culture.

The 2016 festival takes place over two weekends, from April 22-24 and April 28 to May 1, at the New Orleans Fair Grounds. This year’s line-up features an array of highly acclaimed musical acts.

Among this year’s many performers are Stevie Wonder, Pearl Jam, the Red Hot Chili Peppers, Van Morrison, Paul Simon, Neil Young, Nick Jonas, Elvis Costello and Lauryn Hill, as well as jazz stalwarts like trumpeters Terence Blanchard, Chris Botti and Arturo Sandoval, R&B singers such as Aaron Neville and Mavis Staples, and up-and-coming artists like Janelle Monae. And of course the festival wouldn’t be complete without New Orleans’ Preservation Hall Jazz Band. There will also be a tribute to the legendary blues guitarist B.B. King, who died in 2015.

What’s great about music at the jazz fest is that you’ll see plenty of names you recognize but there’s also a chance to discover terrific new artists at spaces devoted to Afro-centric and world music, blues, contemporary jazz, gospel, Cajun and zydeco, traditional New Orleans jazz and New Orleans brass bands.

The heritage part of the Jazz & Heritage Festival gets just as much attention as the music. Visitors can watch artists create elaborate sculptures for Mardi Gras floats at the Louisiana Folklife Village as well as browse the festival marketplaces for handcrafted clothing, jewelry, artwork and musical instruments. While browsing, there’s plenty of opportunity to chow down on Louisiana favorites including po-boys, crawfish, jambalaya, gumbo, red beans and rice, beignets and café au lait.

The first Jazz Festival attracted about 350 people. But it’s grown hugely popular, attracting about 460,000 spectators last year. That means the demand for hotel rooms is high, making it essential to book a room as early as possible.

Many hotels offer festival rates, including the Royal Sonesta New Orleans, located in the heart of the French Quarter and featuring live jazz nightly; Loew’s New Orleans Hotel, across from Harrah’s Casino and offering views of the Mississippi River or New Orleans skyline; and the W New Orleans – French Quarter, located south of Bourbon Street, which has undergone a multimillion-dollar transformation.

Single-day tickets to the Jazz Festival are $65 in advance and $75 at the gate. Shuttles provide transportation from locations in the city to the festival. Springtime in New Orleans can range from warm to extremely hot. While there’s some shade, the Fair Grounds infield is mostly wide open to the sun, so you’ll want to wear cool clothing and bring sunglasses, a hat, sunscreen and comfortable shoes.

For help planning a trip to the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival, contact us today.